



Do I still owe  
child support  
if I am on public  
assistance  
(TANF)?



*Washington State*  
Department of Social  
& Health Services

**Division of Child Support**

## **Your child support obligation doesn't just go away.**

When you are receiving public assistance, also known as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), your child support obligation doesn't disappear; it can keep piling up, month after month, unless you act to change your order.

## **Your child support obligation can be changed.**

One of the grounds for modifying a child support order is a change in circumstances. Receiving public assistance may qualify as a change in your circumstances. The Division of Child Support (DCS) can help you modify your child support order.

If you do not currently have a case open with DCS, you can apply for DCS services, which can include modifying your support order.

## ***How can I get help?***

You can contact DCS by calling toll free or writing to any of our offices listed at the end of this brochure. If you don't know which office handles your case, call 1-800-442-KIDS. You may also wish to contact an attorney, so we have provided a list of legal resources.

## ***What services does DCS provide?***

DCS provides child support services for the state of Washington. We establish paternity, and we establish, modify, and enforce child support obligations.

## ***What services does DCS not provide?***

DCS does not provide visitation, custody, or parenting plan services.

## ***What is a modification?***

"To modify a child support order" is the process of changing the amount of support due under your order. Modification doesn't happen automatically - you have to ask for it, and participate in the process.

## ***How can modifying my order help me?***

If you are unable to pay your child support while you are on assistance, you will have a big debt waiting for you when you go to work or stop receiving assistance. This doesn't help you or your children. Your child support order should be based on your ability to pay. If you have no income, your order should reflect your current circumstances.

## ***How does modification work?***

DCS can't automatically modify your child support order when we find out you are on assistance. You must ask DCS to review and modify your order. Don't wait - the earliest date that a modification can be effective is the date the petition to modify is filed, no matter how long ago your circumstances changed. Also, modifications are prospective only, which means we can't modify backwards, just for the future.

If you ask DCS to review and modify your order, we will send you some forms to fill out. Complete and return these forms as soon as possible.

## ***Can I qualify for a zero order so that I don't have to pay support right now?***

Your child support order will be set according to the Washington State Child Support Schedule. If you have no income other than public assistance, you may qualify for a "zero" order. If you have income or resources, you may be required to pay support even though you are on public assistance.

## ***Does it matter what kind of support order I have?***

No, it doesn't matter if you have a court order or an administrative order, or even if the order is from another state. DCS can still review and assist you in modifying your child support order. We can petition to modify administrative orders through our administrative process, but we may need to refer your case to the local prosecuting attorney to proceed in superior court. We may also need to ask another state or Indian tribe to review and modify your support order.

## ***How do I modify an administrative order?***

QA Modifying an administrative order can usually happen quickly. You can start the administrative modification process by filing a DSHS 9-280B form, the Petition for Modification. DCS will send you the form on request, or your Community Service Office may have some forms available for you to use. Remember that the earliest effective date for your modification will be the date the petition for modification is filed.

## ***How do I modify a court order?***

QA Modifying a court order can take six months or more. When you ask DCS to review and modify your order, it will still be awhile before the petition is filed with the court. You may decide that you want to proceed in superior court on your own without our assistance. If DCS handles the modification, we do not represent you or the other party to the support order; you may want to use your own attorney. Just like with administrative orders, the earliest date for the modification is the date the petition is filed with the court, not the date you ask DCS for help.

## ***How do I know what kind of order I have?***

QA The easiest way to find out is to ask DCS. Generally speaking, a court order is signed by a judge and has a “caption” at the top telling you which court entered the order. An administrative order doesn’t.

## ***Can DCS collect child support from me while I am on public assistance?***

QA If you owe child support, DCS will continue to try to collect from you even when you receive public assistance such as a TANF or a General Assistance - Unemployment (GA-U) grant. DCS cannot take and keep your public assistance money, but we can keep your wages, earnings, or assets.

## ***Can DCS take my bank account?***

One of the ways DCS collects support debts is to seize bank accounts. DCS cannot tell if the money in your account is from public assistance before we take collection action. If we freeze your account and it contains public assistance money, contact DCS immediately.

## ***Can DCS take my wages?***

If you receive public assistance and earn wages, DCS can collect up to 50% of your net earnings from your employer. To avoid this, contact your support enforcement officer immediately when you get a job and work out a repayment agreement. This is also a good time to request a modification of your order. If you have an administrative order, you may be entitled to request a late hearing. If you have a court order or an administrative order, you may also request a conference board. Under some circumstances, a hearing or a conference board may reduce part of your child support debts.

## ***What about when I stop receiving public assistance or go to work?***

When you stop receiving public assistance or go to work, DCS will want to collect any child support you owe, and will be interested in modifying your child support order to reflect your earnings. When you get a job, you should contact DCS. If we have to track down your employer, we will most likely serve a 50% withhold on your wages and try to obtain other assets. If you contact DCS and tell us you are working, we can work with you to set up a payment plan. Federal and state law requires that we collect at least your current support amount plus something on arrears, so in most cases we don't have to take the full 50% of wages. For those enrolled in job programs such as Community Jobs, DCS may agree to take less than current support for a short time. To see if you qualify, contact DCS. It's a good idea to contact us as soon as you go to work or stop receiving assistance so we can talk about payment options.

## ***What if I didn't modify my order?***

Under appropriate circumstances, DCS will consider charging off part or all of a support debt if you were unable to pay the debt when it was due. You may contact DCS and ask about a "conference board."

## ***How do I contact DCS?***

You can call or write. When you write to DCS, use your Social Security number or your DCS case number (the IV-D number). Also, include your assistance unit number so that we can verify your circumstances.

## ***What about confidentiality?***

If you want, you can have someone (a relative or friend) call DCS on your behalf. DCS staff can answer general inquiries for anyone, but we cannot discuss specific details of your case unless we have your written permission because all information in DCS records is confidential. You can use the form on the last page of this brochure to give permission for us to talk to someone else.

## ***Can DCS enter a new support order when I'm on assistance?***

Even though you are receiving assistance, DCS may try to establish a new child support obligation if you do not reside with all of your children.

## ***How to deal with a new notice:***

If you get a support establishment notice from DCS:

**Do something immediately!**  
**Do not just ignore it!**

Usually, you will have twenty days to respond to a notice we serve on you. If you file a timely objection, we will set the matter for hearing. (We have another brochure about

hearings.) If you do not respond, the notice becomes a support order after twenty days, and DCS will start enforcing the order. And the debt will start piling up.

**Whatever your situation, contact DCS and we will be happy to work with you!**

### **Persons with Disabilities:**

If you need other special assistance (such as a sign language interpreter or alternate format materials) because of a disability, we can provide help free of charge.

**If you would like more information, please contact the field office in the county where you reside, and visit the DCS internet web site at: <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/dcs/>**

**Please send all DCS Field Office correspondence to the following address:**

Division of child Support  
P.O. Box 11520  
Tacoma, Washington 98411-5520

## **DCS Field Offices**

### **Everett Field Office**

5415 Evergreen Way  
Everett, WA 98203-9282  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m. 5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (425) 438-4800 or (800) 729-7580  
Fax: (425) 438-4879  
TDD: (425)438-4939 or 1-800-241-9489  
E-mail: [everett-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:everett-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

### **Fife Field Office**

Tacoma, WA 98401-2950  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (253) 922-0454 or (866) 243-4449  
Fax: (253) 926-0284  
TTY: (866) 270-0832  
E-mail: [imail\\_fif@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:imail_fif@dshs.wa.gov)

### **Kennewick Field Office**

500 N. Morain, #2210 Walla Walla  
Kennewick, WA 99336-0550  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.- Fri.  
Phone: (509) 374-2000 or (800) 345-9981  
Fax: (509) 734-7251  
TDD: (509) 734-7267  
E-mail: [kennewick-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:kennewick-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

## **Counties Served**

*Island, San Juan, Skagit,  
Snohomish, Whatcom*

*King, Kitsap, Pierce*

*Benton, Columbia, Franklin,*



## DCS Field Offices

## Counties Served

### **Olympia Field Office**

6135 Martin Way  
Olympia Field Office  
6135 Martin Way  
Olympia, WA 98507-9209  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (360) 664-6900 or (800) 345-9964  
TDD: (360) 438-8906  
Fax: (360) 438-8520  
E-mail: [olympia-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:olympia-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

Grays Harbor, Mason, Thurston,  
Jefferson, Clallam, Pierce

### **Seattle Field Office**

500 First Avenue South  
Seattle, WA 98104-2830  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Telephone: (206) 341-7000 or (800) 526-8658  
Fax: (206) 464-7449  
TDD: (206) 464-7851  
E-mail: [seattle-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:seattle-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

King

### **Spokane Field Office**

W. 1608 Boone  
Spokane, WA 99220-2560  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (509) 363-5000 or (800) 345-9982  
Fax: (509) 456-4148  
TDD: (509) 363-5080  
E-mail: [spomail@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:spomail@dshs.wa.gov)

Spokane, Stevens, Whitman,  
Asotin, Ferry, Garfield,  
Lincoln, Pend Oreille

### **Tacoma Field Office**

2121 S. State Street  
Tacoma, WA 98401-1237  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (253) 597-3700 or (800) 345-9976  
Fax: (253) 597-3725  
TDD: (253) 593-9976  
E-mail: [tacoma-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:tacoma-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

Kitsap, Pierce

### **Vancouver Field Office**

5411 E. Mill Plain Blvd., Bldg. 3  
Vancouver, WA 98662-0269  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Phone: (360) 696-6100 or (800) 345-9984  
Fax: (360) 696-6491  
TDD: (360) 690-4633  
E-mail: [vancouver-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:vancouver-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat,  
Lewis, Pacific, Skamania,  
Wahkiakum

## **DCS Field Offices**

## **Counties Served**

### **Wenatchee Field Office**

515 Grant Road,  
East Wenatchee, WA 98802  
Wenatchee, WA 98807-2929  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.-Fri.  
Telephone: (509) 886-6800 or (800) 535-1113  
Fax: (509) 886-6212  
TDD: (509) 886-6833  
E-mail: [wenatchee-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:wenatchee-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

Adams, Chelan, Douglas,  
Grant, Okanogan

### **Yakima Field Office**

1002 North 16th Avenue  
Yakima, WA 98907  
Office Hrs.: 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m., Mon.- Fri.  
Telephone: (509) 249-6000 or (800) 441-0859  
Fax: (509) 576-3776  
TDD: (509) 575-2675  
E-mail: [yakima-dcs@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:yakima-dcs@dshs.wa.gov)

Kittitas, Yakima

## **Legal Resources:**

### **Northwest Justice Project's Coordinated Legal Education, Advice & Referral (CLEAR) Project**

1-888-201-1014

<http://www.nwjustice.org>

### **Northwest Women's Law Center Information & Referral Line**

(206) 621-7691

<http://www.nwwlc.org>

### **To find lawyer referral services for your county, call the Washington State Bar Association at:**

1 (800) 945-9722

<http://www.wsba.org>

# Authorization to Disclose Personal Information

I, \_\_\_\_\_, of \_\_\_\_\_, authorize the Department of Social and Health Services to disclose the following records to:

Name of person authorized to receive information \_\_\_\_\_ Address of person authorized to receive information \_\_\_\_\_

I authorize disclosure of all personal information except the following:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This authorization remains effective until:

Case Number \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature Of Client \_\_\_\_\_

Address Of Client \_\_\_\_\_



**Division of Child Support**